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## DOH WALTON ENCOURAGES RESIDENTS TO BE WARY OF POTENTIAL RABIES

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**DeFuniak Springs, Fla** - Rabies is a vaccine preventable viral disease that affects mammals, and is most often transmitted through the bite of a rabid animal. While a clear majority of reported rabies cases occur in animals like raccoons, foxes, dogs, and cats, bats provide a vector for rabies transmission.

Rabies virus infects the central nervous system of the host, eventually causing disease to the brain, followed by death. Rabies shares many initial symptoms of other diseases to include: fever, headache, and general discomfort or weakness. As the rabies becomes more progressive, the host can experience anxiety, hallucinations, hyper salivation, agitation, confusion, slight or partial paralysis, insomnia, hydrophobia, and difficulty swallowing. Within days of symptom onset, death frequently occurs.

All species of mammals are vulnerable to the rabies virus; however, few species are important vectors for rabies transmission. In the United States, rabies has been identified in dogs, cats, foxes, raccoons, and coyotes. Several species of bats are also found to be reservoirs for the rabies virus. Transmission of the rabies virus begins with the saliva of the host being passed to an uninfected host via bite or scratch. Some animals, such as cats self-groom. This allows the rabies virus to be transmitted from a scratch.

People often know when they have been bitten by a bat, however many species of bats have extremely small teeth, which allow the bite marks to quickly disappear. If an individual is bitten by a bat, or expose their eyes, nose, mouth, or wound to infectious materials from a bat such as saliva or brain material, wash the affected area thoroughly with soap and warm water, and seek medical attention immediately. If possible, the bat should be captured and sent to a laboratory for rabies testing.

If you wake up because a bat has landed on you while you were sleeping, or wake up and observe a bat in your room, you should try to safely capture the bat and have it tested for rabies. The same safety measures should be taken if a bat is found in the room of a small child, an individual that is mentally impaired, or an individual that is intoxicated. The small teeth of a bat can make any type of bite extremely difficult to find.

You cannot tell that an animal has rabies by just looking at them. Rabies can only be confirmed by laboratory testing. Be safe, and never handle animals that have the potential to be rabid.

If you think your pet has been bitten by a bat, please contact our veterinarian and local health department for immediate assistance and testing. Keeping your pets up to date on their rabies vaccination can help in the limiting the spread of the rabies virus.

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